

Defense Industry Students Graduate Advanced Program Management Course

APMC Students Share Their Perspectives

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Diminished business opportunities faced by defense firms since the end of the Cold War have been accompanied by a bewildering pace of change in the way the Department of Defense does business with its suppliers. Laws streamlining acquisition procedures have been passed by Congress at the same time the Department has moved on its own to carry out significant policy changes in areas such as military specifications and standards reform and the single process initiative. Those who operated under the old acquisition procedures have every right to feel a bit overwhelmed by the breadth and speed of these procedural changes.

For those in industry seeking to understand the new DoD approach to business, however, the Advanced Program Management Course (APMC) at the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) at Fort Belvoir, Va., represents an excellent, if somewhat underutilized, resource for keeping up with the nature and pace of defense acquisition policy change. Following are reflections on the experience that this recent graduate of the APMC had in the program, offered in the hope that more industry members will see the value of participation in the course offerings at the College.

APMC can best be described as a kaleidoscopic experience. It was a 14-week exercise in time management in which we focused on 12 major policy

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ON APRIL 18, DSMC GRADUATED SIX INDUSTRY STUDENTS FROM ITS ADVANCED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COURSE (APMC) 97-1 AT A CEREMONY CONDUCTED IN ESSAYONS THEATER, FORT BELVOIR, VA. PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GEORGE KRIKORIAN, INDUSTRY CHAIR, DSMC EXECUTIVE INSTITUTE; MICHAEL C. MITCHELL, LOCKHEED MARTIN CORPORATION; ROBERT J. MORRIS, PRATT & WHITNEY; R. PAUL NORMANDY, THE MITRE CORPORATION; ARMY BRIG. GEN. RICHARD A. BLACK, DSMC COMMANDANT; RICHARD L. PASCO, JR., THE BOEING COMPANY; LOUIS L. JOBIN III, ROBBINS-GIOIA, INC; LEON F. SHIFFLETT, SIKORSKY AIRCRAFT CORPORATION; AND GEORGE MERCHANT, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, ADVANCED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COURSE. (NOT SHOWN—MICHAEL J. LOMBARD, PRATT & WHITNEY)

topics, including defense acquisition policy, contractor finance, contract management, earned value management, funds management, logistics support management, managerial development, manufacturing management, principles of program management, software management, systems engineering management, and test and evaluation. Beyond these academic topics, however, APMC is mind-mapping and Ah-Hahs, ISTJs, and



ENFPs. It's a "most comfortable pad," the Dupont Ratio (Is Dupont making gunpowder again?), and knowing that in the end, "it all depends."¹

With full days of classes throughout most of the program and at least a couple of hours of preparation each evening, for a period the challenge was not so much the degree of learning

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as to avoid falling hopelessly behind in the readings! While one legitimately might ask how any of the topics covered could be done justice in 14 short weeks, the broad array of issues was made both interesting and instructive by the manner in which it was taught.

The classes were led by faculty members who were either uniformed military or DoD civilians, all of whom had substantial experience in defense acquisition. But because the teaching method was based on student-directed case studies and integrated exercises, in many of our classes the students were really teaching other students. Based on the diverse and extensive nature of the students' experience, this was an unparalleled resource from which to learn. There were

300 students in APMC 97-1. In my study group of 30 individuals, I was the sole industry representative. The other 29 members of the section included uniformed and civilian representatives from all Services, many with advanced degrees and all of whom had significant acquisition experience. Without a doubt, it was during the exchanges with these fellow students during classroom discussions or in conversations between classes that the real APMC learning occurred.

The understanding I gained of the customer's perspective on the acquisition system and the contractor's role in it, and the relationships I established with these future program managers during my 14 weeks at APMC would have taken years to attain through the normal course of our business. Moreover, because the learning process in the program is based on the Integrated Product and Process Development and Integrated Product Team approaches now featured in defense acquisition, APMC affords industry participants an excellent simulation of the procedures the Department currently is using to improve productivity and constrain costs in its acquisition activities.

If the classroom experience I had at APMC had been all there was to the program, it would have been worth the time and investment. But there was much, much more to the program. For example, once a week we as a class of 300 heard from distinguished guest lecturers including representatives from OSD, the Services, congressional staff, and industry. While all of these guest speakers were first-rate, the highlight for me was the day the three Service Acquisition Executives, Gil Decker, John Douglass, and Art Money of the Army, Navy, and Air Force respectively, spoke to our class. The technical understanding exhibited by these three, along with the mutual respect which they held for one another, was most impressive and spoke well of the acquisition team that has been assembled in the Department.

Because of the tremendous influence that the Congress exerts on acquisition policy as well as program management, APMC provided extensive briefings on the congressional process and an opportunity for the students to travel to Capitol Hill for a day. During the day on the Hill, the class had the chance to attend meetings with Members and staff, and to sit in on public hearings addressing issues affecting defense programs and procedures.² As a former Senate staffer, the opportunity to share with my classmates some of the experiences I had had in my eight years on the Hill was one of the highlights of my APMC experience.

Independent study also is a significant element of the program. DSMC features an outstanding library collection focused on defense acquisition and a Learning Resource Center that contains audio and video tapes that permit the learning experience to extend beyond time spent on campus. Electives were made available on a host of topics in order to zero in on particular aspects of the acquisition process and allow students to tailor their learning experience to their par-

ticular career and personal development needs. For example, each Wednesday morning during the program, I met with a study group to prepare for the Certified Professional Contract Manager (CPCM) examination administered by the National Contract Management Association. This study group provided excellent preparation for the exam in an environment in which students again learned from other students. Finally, there was the opportunity to participate in field trips that permitted the testing of information learned in the classroom in real life manufacturing or testing facilities. In this regard, I participated in very enlightening visits to three sites in Maryland: the General Motors minivan plant in Baltimore, the Beretta U.S.A. handgun manufacturing plant in Accokeek, and the Army's Aberdeen Proving Grounds Test Center.

In conclusion, APMC represents an excellent opportunity to gain a solid technical understanding of the most recent defense acquisition policy developments in a setting that features the procedures currently employed by the Department of Defense. But of

even greater importance is the occasion it provides to meet and interact with the future leaders of the DoD Acquisition Corps. This opportunity for exchange between government and industry representatives creates a learning experience for both partners in the system. For the industry participants, APMC represents a value-added experience for the company and the individual in a manner that in 14 short weeks really cannot be attained any other way.

ENDNOTES

1. For those interested in learning why in the end "it all depends," please contact George Krikorian, Industry Chair, Defense Systems Management College, Fort Belvoir, Va. 22060-5565, (703) 805-4944. For APMC registration information or catalog information on the other acquisition courses offered at DSMC, contact the College Registrar at (703) 805-3666.
2. For a more comprehensive overview of acquisition managers and their relationships with Capitol Hill, see DSMC's publication, *Congressional Involvement and Relations*, "A Guide for Department of Defense Acquisition Managers," August 1992.



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